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PROVINCIAL NURSE CORPS OF THE PHILIPPINES¹

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When the American people found themselves responsible for the welfare of a dependent people their first impulse was to extend to these dependents the same liberties, religious, civil and political, which are the very foundation of our national life; but a close study of the Filipinos revealed the fact that at least 80 per cent of the Philippine people were illiterate and were unable to speak any common language. Their fifteen or more Malay dialects are very crude and have only a small vocabulary, making it impossible to communicate with them in terms of modern thought. The policy adopted by this government, therefore, was to begin at once to educate the people to the use of a common language, English, and at the same time to carry on a school of practical politics which would lead the Filipinos by gradual steps to achieve their own individual idea of self government. It is not the purpose of this paper to describe the progress of education in the Philippines under American government, although it is one of the most interesting subjects of modern times, but rather to confine it to one small sub-division of that education which deals with the training of nurses.

This work was begun by the Bureau of Education but was transferred to the Bureau of Health in April, 1910, and at the same time a class for male nurses was organized by the same Bureau, as the need for well-trained, intelligent men for the male wards of hospitals (particularly the prison hospitals), sanitary inspectors, and for certain kinds of district nursing, was very great. Another reason was the prevalence of calamities caused by earthquakes, typhoons, cholera epidemics, etc., to which the Philippines seem particularly liable. In cases like this, having trained men do the field work, while the women nurses attend to the field hospitals, makes an ideal combination.

This course, as first planned, was to cover two and one-half years of work, or more, if the pupil seemed to need it; but it was demonstrated by experience that none of the pupils could complete a satisfactory course in the allotted time, so the course was increased to three and one-half years, with an elective course of six months for post-graduate work, along such lines as district nursing, dispensary management, etc.—the pupil receiving an additional diploma for this work.

With the opening of the Philippine General Hospital, an institution

¹The photographs illustrating this article are reproduced through the courtesy of Dr. Snodgrass.

of 500 beds, with an out-patient department where about 1000 patients were treated daily, it was found possible to give the nurses an excellent practical course in medical, surgical, obstetrical and dispensary nursing in this institution, while the nursing of dangerous communicable diseases is taught at San Lazaro Hospital, where cholera, plague, tuberculosis, measles, diphtheria, small-pox, yaws, etc., are treated.

A corps of forty American graduate nurses gives constant supervision to the work of the pupil nurses, and now their number is augmented by a large number of Filipina graduates. There are 212 regular pupils in the training school, besides some extras from the non-Christian provinces and the number of eligibles from which to choose is constantly increasing. In this connection I wish to correct an error which I have heard constantly repeated, and that is that the nurses are drawn only from the families of *illustrados*. This is not the case. The nurses come from all classes in the islands, two from each province, their admittance depending upon character and scholarship, and not upon family or any other kind of "influence."

The nurses are given six months preliminary training during which they go to the wards for about two hours a day to make beds, clean hospital furniture and utensils, set trays, serve diets, arrange cupboards and linens, and disinfect clothing. The remainder of the day is spent in the class room where they are taught bandaging, hospital housekeeping, English, practical nursing, text-book and demonstration, cooking and anatomy. At the end of the preliminary period all are given a very rigid physical examination, and those who show any signs of disease of any kind are sent home, but if they are perfectly well and if their character, disposition and progress are satisfactory, they are placed on regular ward duty, intermitted by classes.

The nurses are sent to the University for anatomy, physiology, embryology, bacteriology, urinalysis, and materia-medica. All other subjects are taught in the class room of the school, and are practised in the hospital, and the training of the nurses is identical with that given by the very best training schools in the United States. In this training school there are now about one hundred graduate Filipina and Filipino nurses ready for work. (This does not include the nurses graduated by the Mary Johnson, St. Paul's and University Hospitals).

When the Philippine Training School for Nurses graduated its second class, it was felt that the time had come to organize a Provincial Nursing Corps, which it was hoped would eventually reach every town in the provinces; but as the Island of Cebu is one of the most densely populated islands of the Philippine group, and contains the next largest city to Manila, it was decided to begin there. A consultation with Dr. Pond,



**PUPIL NURSES' AMBULANCE, PHILIPPINE GENERAL
HOSPITAL, MANILA**



WHERE THE NURSES FIND THEIR PATIENTS

the District Health Officer for the Province, made it clear that at least three nurses could be used at once; in fact, personal observation led the author to believe that at least three to every town could be used to advantage, but as only three nurses were available, it seemed wiser not to mention the larger number until the public began to demand them.

Dr. Pond at once undertook to appoint the nurses as Sanitary Inspectors, and to give them a salary of twenty dollars a month until the necessary steps were taken to have them appointed as Civil Service nurses and paid a nurse's salary from the Provincial funds.

The Filipina nurses, as a class, seem to be entirely unmercenary and they made no objection to the salary, which scarcely covered their living expenses, so anxious were they to begin the work. Their action in this matter is particularly creditable when we remember that the alternative was a position on the graduate staff of the Philippine General Hospital at Manila, with the protection of Civil Service appointment. You can imagine how happy this decision made the American nurses who were responsible for their training, as it demonstrated that they had acquired the real nurse's outlook upon life and that they regarded themselves really as "Soldiers of the common good" seeking to give back to their people who out of their poverty had so generously educated them, some practical demonstration of their gratitude.

Fortunately the preliminaries were soon arranged, and in the course of a few months the nurses were duly appointed as Provincial nurses with Civil Service protection.

It was announced in the papers that the nurses were ready to respond to calls and that one of them would give a talk in the Visayan language (the dialect spoken in Cebu), the subject to be "Infant Feeding." The mothers were especially invited, but the lecture was open to all.

The assembly hall of the High School was used for the lecture and the hour set was 9 a.m. This lecture was attended by a large number of High School students, girls and boys, and about twenty mothers with their young babies. The writer was present and heard the lecture delivered by one of the Filipina nurses, but what she said will forever remain a mystery to all who did not understand Visayan. However, it seemed to interest pupils and mothers alike, and when at the conclusion of the lecture the nurse announced that she would weigh the babies, the mothers were delighted and became very anxious to talk with the nurses about their individual babies. This, of course, gave the nurses a chance to take their names and addresses and to establish cordial relations which would be followed up by visits to their homes, etc. Within a week the nurses were called upon night and day, and were becoming so interested that it seemed as if they could never be spared from the city of Cebu;

but this was only the beginning of the plan, and in a short time one was sent to make a tour of the towns on the Island and to establish a regular route, with a visiting day once in two weeks in each town. All the new-born were visited in their homes, and in this way relations were established with families in several neighborhoods and the way left open for suggestions along many lines, the nurse showing the mothers how to bathe and care for older children, as well as the baby. Where there were sick, instructions were given for their care, the nurse carefully demonstrating it to the member of the family who was doing the nursing. Instructions were given to pregnant women on the care of themselves and their unborn children.

The nurses delivered the mothers, when called upon to do so, and this allowed them to demonstrate to a dozen or so neighbors, who always come to look on, the main points in caring for the new-born. The obstetric practices of the ignorant Filipinos are beyond belief, but these little native nurses, trained in an up-to-date, modern hospital, with the very latest appliances for a labor room, set to work to deliver these poor women on the floor of their huts without a moment's hesitation. They were supplied with an obstetrical pack which contained all things needful, and the nurses seemed not to notice the difficulties of delivering a woman on their knees.

Soon after the nurses started, there was an epidemic of amoebic dysentery on a near-by Island, and the nurses were able to make such a record for themselves there that the very last vestige of prejudice disappeared.

The nurses always wear their uniforms, and it certainly took a great deal of courage for a Filipina to go to some of those primitive towns dressed in "American" clothes, but in time it was accepted by the people as a sign of distinction, and now the nurses do not feel at all conspicuous in it.

The nurses keep a complete card system of every patient attended, all supplies used, etc., and any one interested in like work and desiring further information on the subject can obtain it from Dr. Victor G. Heiser, Director of Health, Manila, P. I.



INTERIOR OF A HOME WHERE PROVINCIAL NURSES WORK



A SCHOOL WHERE HEALTH TALKS ARE GIVEN



A FILIPINA NURSE